

THE LOVE OF THE PRINCE OF GLOTTENBERG

BY ANTHONY HOPE.

It was in the spring of the year that Ludwig, Prince of Glottenberg, came courting the Princess Osra; for his father had sought the most beautiful lady of a royal house in Europe, and had found none to equal Osra. Therefore the prince came to Strelsau with a great retinue, and was lodged in the White Palace, which stood on the outskirts of the city, where the public gardens now are (for the palace itself was sacked and burnt by the people in the rising of 1848). Here Ludwig stayed many days, giving every day to pay his respects to the king and queen, and to make his court to the princess. King Rudolf had received him with the utmost friendship, and was, for reasons of state, then of great moment but now of vanished interest, as eager for the match as was the King of Glottenberg himself; and he grew very impatient with his sister when she hesitated to accept Ludwig's hand, alleging that she felt for him no more than a kind of esteem, and what was as much to the purpose, that he felt no more for her. For although he was a prince, and was very accomplished, both in learning and in exercises, yet he was a grave and pensive young man, rather staid than jovial, and seemed, in the princess's eyes (accustomed as they were to catch and check ardent glances), to perform his wooing more as a duty of his station than on the impulse of any passion. Finding in herself, also, no such sweet ashamed emotions as had before now crossed her heart on account of lesser nobles, she grew grave and troubled; and she said to the king:

"Brother, is this love? For I had as lief he were away as here when he is here he kisses my hand as though it were a statue's hand, and—and I feel as though it were. They say you know what love is. Is this love?"

"There are many forms of love," smiled the king. "This is such love as a prince and a princess may most properly feel."

"I do not call it love at all," said Osra with a pout.

When Prince Ludwig came next day to see her and told her, with grave courtesy that his pleasure lay in doing her will she broke out:

"I had rather it lay in watching my face." And then, ashamed, she turned away from him.

He seemed grieved and hurt at her words, and it was with a sigh that he said: "My life shall be given to giving you joy."

She turned round on him with flushed cheek and trembling lips:

"Yes, but I had rather it were spent in getting joy from me."

He cast down his eyes a moment and then, taking her hand, kissed it, but she drew it away sharply, and so that afternoon they parted, he back to his place, she to her chamber, where she was asking again: "Is this love?"

And the next day, when she was passing now and again before her mirror, to ask her pictured face why it would not unlock the door of love.

On another day she would be merry, and again merriment, rallying him on his cooler air and his compliments, professing that for her part she soon grew weary of such wooing and loved to be easy and merry; for thus she would feel to sting him so that he would not be so cold and reserved, and she would follow him in his pursuit. But he made many apologies, blaming nature that had made him grave, but assuring her of his deep affection and respect.

"After ten and respect," murmured Osra with a little toss of her head. "Oh, that I had not been born a princess!"

And yet, though she did not love him, she thought him a very noble gentleman, and trusted to his honor and sincerity in everything. Therefore, when he was still present, and Rudolf and the queen urged her, telling her (the king smilingly, the queen with a touch of sadness) that she must not look to find in the world such love as romantic girls dream of, at last she yielded, and she told her brother that she would marry Prince Ludwig, yet for a little while she would not have the news proclaimed. So Rudolf went, alone and privately, to the White Palace and said to Ludwig:

"Cousin, you have won the fairest lady in the world. Behold, her brother says it!"

Prince Ludwig bowed low, and, taking the king's hand, pressed it, thanking him for his help and approval, and expressing himself as most grateful for the boon of the princess's favor.

"And will you not come with me and find her?" cried the king, with a merry look.

"I have urgent business now," answered Ludwig. "Beg the princess to forgive me. This afternoon I will crave the honor of waiting on her with my humble gratitude."

King Rudolf looked at him, a smile curling on his lips; and he said in one of his gusts of impatience:

"By heaven! is there another man in the world who would talk about gratitude, and business, and the afternoon, when Osra of Strelsau sat waiting for him?"

"I mean no discourtesy," protested Ludwig, taking the king's arm and glancing at him with most friendly eyes. "Indeed, dear friend, I am rejoiced and honored. But this business of mine will not wait."

So the king, frowning and grumbling and laughing, went back alone, and told the princess that the happy wooer was most grateful, and would come, after his business was transacted, that afternoon. But Osra, having given her hand, would now admit no fault in the man she had chosen, and thanked the king for the message with great dignity. Then the king came to her and, sitting down by her, stroked her hair, saying softly:

"You have had many lovers, sister Osra, and now comes a husband."

hand. Then he rose, and declared his thanks and promised his devotion; but as he spoke the flush faded, and the light died from her eyes, and when at last he drew near to her, and offered to kiss her cheek, her eyes were dead, and her face pale and cold as she suffered him to touch it. He was content to touch it but once, and seemed not to know how cold it was; and so, after more talk of his father's pleasure and his pride, he took his leave, promising to come again the next day.

That evening there came a gentleman from the Prince of Glottenberg, carrying most humble excuses from his master, who (so he said) was prevented from waiting on the princess the next day by a certain very urgent affair that took him from Strelsau, and would keep him absent from the city all day long; and the gentleman delivered to Osra a letter from the prince, full of graceful and profound apologies, and pleading an engagement that his honor would not let him break; for nothing short of that, said he, should have kept him from her side. There followed some lover's phrases, scantly worded, and frigid in an assumed passion. But Osra smiled graciously and sent back a message, readily accepting all that the prince urged in excuse. And she told what had passed to the king, with

will go with me?" And she knew of none, for she would not take Christian with her, and she shrank from speaking of the matter to any of the gentlemen of the court. And yet she must know. But at last she sprang up from the chair into which she had sunk despondingly, exclaiming:

"He is a gentleman and my friend. He will go with me."

And she sent hastily for the Bishop of Modenstein, who was then in Strelsau, bidding him come dressed for riding, and with a sword and the best horse in his stable. And the bishop came equipped as she bade him, and in very great wonder. But when she told him what she wanted and what Christian had made known to her, he grew grave, saying that they must wait and consult the king when he returned.

"I will not wait an hour," she cried. "I cannot wait an hour."

"Then I will ride, and bring you word. You must not go," he urged. "Nay, if I go alone, I will go," said she. "Yes, I will go, and myself fling his falsehood in his teeth."

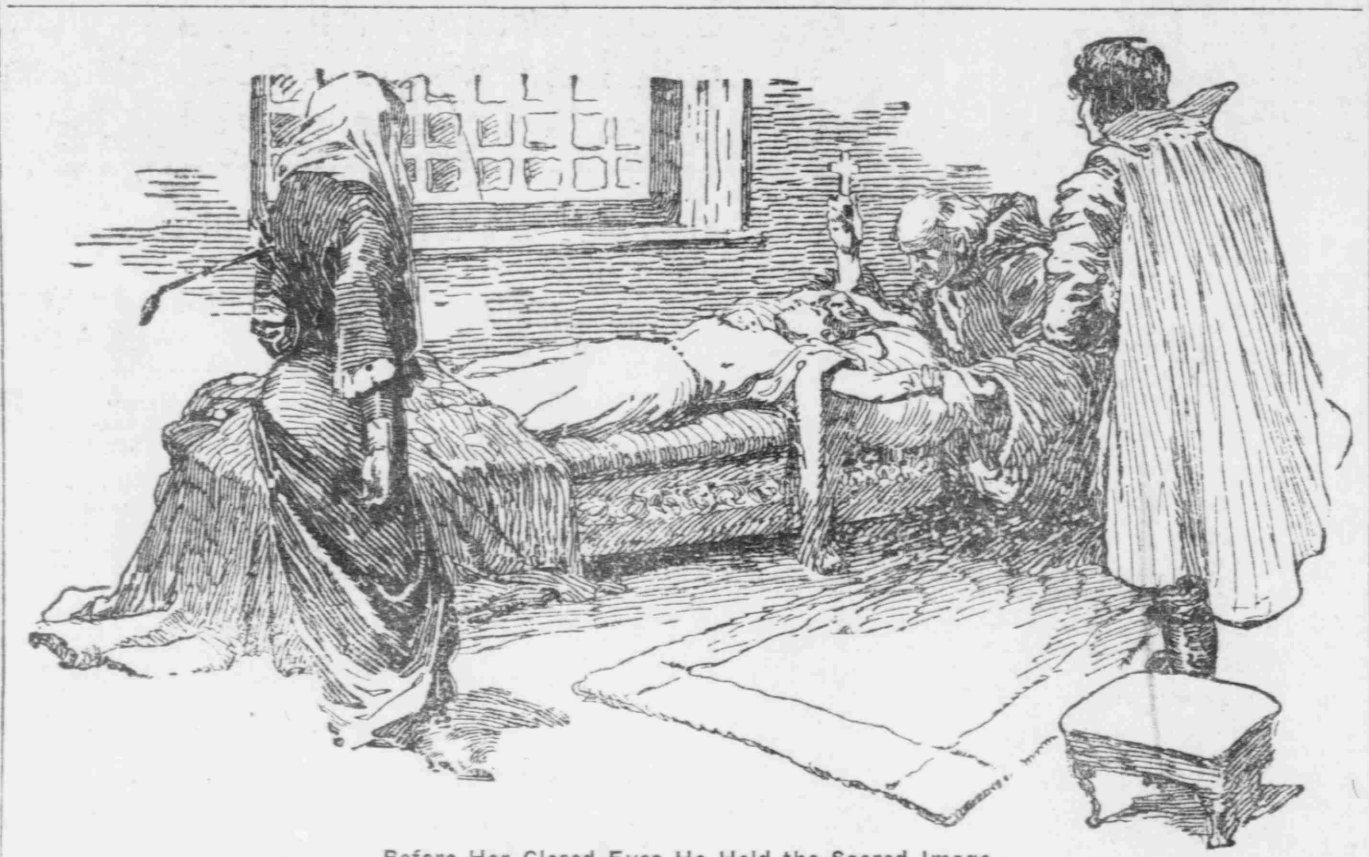
Finding her thus resolved, the bishop knew that he could not turn her; so, leaving her to prepare herself, he sought Christian Hantz, and charged him to bring three horses to the most

sionate sobs, that struck their ears like the distant cry of some brute creature in pain that it cannot understand. Yet Osra's face was stern and cold, and her lips curled scornfully when she saw the bishop's look of pity.

"Come, let us end it," said she; and with a firm step she began to mount the stairs that lay between them and the door.

Yet once again they paused outside the door, for it seemed as though the princess could not choose but listen to the passionate words of love that pierced her ears like knives. Yet they were all sad, speaking of renunciation, not happiness. But at least she heard her own name; then, with a sudden start, she caught the bishop's hands, for she could not listen longer. And she staggered and reeled as she whistened to him: "The door, the door—open the door!"

In the middle of the room stood the Prince of Glottenberg, and, strained in a close embrace, clinging to him, supported by his arms, with head buried in his breast, was a girl of slight and slender figure, graceful, though not tall, and her body was still shaken by continual struggling sobs. The prince held her there as though against the world, but raised his head and looked at the intruders with a



Before Her Closed Eyes He Held the Sacred Image.

her head high in the air, and a careless haughtiness, so that even the king did not rally her, nor yet venture to comfort her, but urged her to spend the next day in riding with the queen and him; for they were setting out for Zenda, where the king was to hunt in the forest, and she could ride some part of the way with them and return in the evening. And she, wishing that she had sent first to the prince to bid him not come, agreed to go with her brother.

Thus, the next morning, they rode out, the king and queen with their retinue, the princess, attended by one of her guards, named Christian Hantz, who was greatly attached to her, and most zealous in praise and admiration of her. This fellow had taken on himself to be very angry with Prince Ludwig's coldness, but dared say nothing of it. Yet, impelled by his anger, he had set himself to watch the prince very closely; and thus he had, as he conceived, discovered something that brought a twinkle into his eye and a triumphant smile to his lips as he rode behind the princess. Some fifteen miles she accompanied her brother, and then turning with Christian took another road back to the city. Alone she rode, her mind full of sad thoughts; while Christian, behind, still wore his malicious smile. But presently, although she had not commanded him, he quickened his pace, and came up to her side, relying on the favor which she always showed him for excuse.

"Well, Christian," said she, "have you something to say to me?"

For answer he pointed to a small house that stood among the trees, some way from the road, and he said:

"If I were Ludwig and not Christian, yet I would be where Christian is, and not there where Ludwig is." And he pointed still at the house.

She faced round on him in anger at his daring to speak to her of the prince, yet it was a bold fellow, and would not be silenced now that he had begun to speak. He knew also that she would bear much from him; so he leant over toward her, saying:

"By your bounty, madam, I have money, and he who has money can get knowledge. So I know that the prince is there. For fifty pounds I gained a servant of his, and he told me."

"I do not know why you should spy on the prince," said she, "and I do not care to know where the prince is." And she touched her horse with the spur, and cantered fast forward, leaving the little house behind. But Christian persisted, partly in a foolish grudge against any man who could win what was above his reach, partly in an honest anger that she whom he worshiped should be treated lightly by another; and he forced her to hear what he had learnt from the gossip of the prince's groom, telling it to her in hints and half-spoken sentences, yet so plainly that she could not miss the drift of it. She rode the faster toward Strelsau, at first answering nothing; but at last she turned upon him fiercely, saying that he told a lie, and that she knew it was a lie, since she knew where the prince was and what business had taken him away; and she commanded Christian to be silent, and to speak neither to her nor to any one else of his false suspicions; and she bade him, very harshly, to fall back and ride behind her again, which he did sullenly, yet satisfied; for he knew that his arrow had gone home. On she rode with her cheeks aflame and her heart beating, until she came to Strelsau, and having arrived at the palace, ran to her own bedroom and flung herself on her bed.

Here for an hour she lay; then, it being about 4 o'clock, she sat up, pushing her disordered hair back from her hot, aching brow. For an agony of humiliation came upon her, and a fury of resentment against the prince, whose coldness seemed now to need no explanation. Yet she could hardly believe what she had been told of him; for, though she had not loved him, she had accorded to him her full trust. She strove to master her anger and endure her suspense till the next day; but they were too strong for her, and she cried:

"I will go myself. I cannot sleep till I know. But I cannot go alone. Who

private gate of the palace, that opened in a little by-street. Here Christian waited for them with the horses, and they came presently, the bishop wearing a great slouched hat and swaggering like a roystering trooper, while Osra was closely veiled.

In silence they rode a long way, going at great speed. Osra's face was set and rigid, for she felt now no shame at herself for going; nor any fear of what she might find. But the injury to her pride swallowed every other feeling, and at last she said, in short, sharp words, to the bishop of Modenstein, having suddenly thrown back the veil from her face:

"He shall not live, if it prove true." The bishop shook his head. His profession was peace; yet his blood, also, was hot against the man who had put a slight on Princess Osra.

She put out her hand and caught him by the arm, whispering: "Are you my friend?"

"Yes, madam," said he. "Kill him for me then! Kill him for me!"

"I cannot kill him," said the bishop. "I pray God it may prove untrue."

"You are not my friend if you will not kill him," said Osra; and she turned her face away and rode yet more quickly.

At last they came in sight of the little house that stood back from the road, and there was a light in one of the upper windows. The bishop heard a short gasp from Osra's lips, and she pointed with her whip to the window. Now his breath came quick and fast, and he prayed to God that he might remember his sacred character and his vows, and not be led into great and deadly sin at the bidding of that proud, bitter face; and he clenched his left hand and struck his brow with it.

Thus, then, they came to the gate of the avenue that led to the prince's house. Here, having dismounted and tied their horses to the gatepost, they stood an instant and Osra again veiled her face. Side by side, they came to the door of the house, and saw a gentleman standing in front of the door still but watchful. And Osra knew that he was the Prince's chamberlain.

When the chamberlain saw them he started violently and clapped a hand to his sword; but Osra flung her veil on the ground and the bishop gripped his arm as with a vise. The chamberlain looked at Osra and at the bishop, and laid down his sword.

"This matter is too great for you, sir," said the bishop. "It is a quarrel of princes. Stand aside!"

And before the chamberlain could make up his mind what to do Osra had passed him, and the bishop had followed her.

Finding themselves in a narrow passage, they made out, by the dim light of a lamp, a flight of stairs that rose from the furthest end of it. In silent speed they mounted till they had reached the top of the first stage, and facing them, eight or ten steps further up, was a door. By the door stood a groom. This was the man who had treacherously told Christian of his master's doings; but when he saw suddenly what had come of his disloyal chatter, the fellow went white as a ghost and came tottering in stealthy silence down the stairs, his finger on his lips. Neither of them spoke to him, nor he to them. They gave no thought to him; his only thought was to escape as soon as he might; so he passed them and, going out, passed also the chamberlain, who stood dazed at the house door, and so disappeared, intent on saving the life he had justly forfeited.

"Hark! There are voices," whispered Osra to the bishop, raising her hand above her head, as they two stood motionless.

The voices came from the door that faced them, the voice of a man and the voice of a woman. Osra glanced at her companion told him that she knew as well as he whose the man's voice was.

The woman's voice spoke low, but the words were not audible. Then came the prince's: "Forever, in life or death, apart or together, forever!"

But the woman's answer came no more in words, but in deep, low, passionate sobs, that struck their ears like the distant cry of some brute creature in pain that it cannot understand. Yet Osra's face was stern and cold, and her lips curled scornfully when she saw the bishop's look of pity.

grave, sad air. There was no shame on her face, and hardly surprise. Presently he took one arm from about the lady, and, raising it, motioned them to still. Osra took one step forward toward where the pair stood. The lady looked up into the prince's face, with a sudden, startled cry clutched him closer, and turned a terrified face over her shoulder. Then she moaned in great fear, and, reeling, fell against the prince, and would have sunk to the ground if he had not upheld her, and her eyes closed and she swooned away. But the princess smiled, and, drawing herself to her full height, stood watching while Ludwig bore the lady to a couch and laid her there. Then, when he came back and faced her, she asked coldly and slowly:

"Who is this woman, sir? Or is she one of those that have no names?"

The prince sprang forward, a sudden anger in his eyes; he raised his hand as if he would have pressed it across her scornful mouth and kept back her bitter words. But she did not flinch, and, pointing at him with her finger, she cried to the bishop, in a ringing voice:

"Kill him, my lord, kill him!" And the sword of the bishop of Modenstein was half-way out of the scabbard.

"I would to God, my lord," said the prince, in low and sad tones, "that God would suffer you to kill me and me to take death at your hands. But neither for you nor for me is the blow lawful. Let me speak to the princess."

The bishop still grasped his sword, for Osra's face and hand still commanded him. But at the instant of his hesitation there came from the couch where the lady lay a low moan of pain. She flung her arms out, and turned groaning, again on her back, and her head lay limply over the side of the couch. The bishop's eyes met Ludwig's, and with a "God forgive me!" he let the sword slip back, and, springing across the room, fell on his knees beside the couch. He broke the gold chain round his neck and grasped the crucifix which he carried in one hand, while with the other he raised the lady's head, praying her to open her eyes before whose closed lids he held the sacred image; and he, who had come so near to great sin, now prayed softly but fervently for her life and God's pity on her.

"Who is she?" asked the princess. But Ludwig's eyes had wandered back to the couch, and he answered only:

"My God, it will kill her!" "I care not," said Osra. But then came another low moan. "I care not," said the princess again. "Ah, she is in great suffering!" And her eyes followed the prince's.

There was silence, save for the lady's low moan and the whispered prayers of the bishop of Modenstein. But the lady opened her eyes, and in an instant, answering the summons, the prince was by her side, kneeling, and holding her hand very tenderly, and he met a glance from the bishop across her prostrate body. The prince bowed his head and one sob burst from him.

"Leave me alone with her for a little, sir," said the bishop; and the prince, obeying, rose and withdrew into the bay of the window, while Osra stood alone near the door by which she had entered.

A few minutes passed, then Osra saw the prince return to where the lady was, and kneel again beside her, and she saw that the bishop was preparing to perform his most sacred and sublime office. The lady's eyes dwelt on him now in peace and resignation, and held Prince Ludwig's hand in her small hand. But Osra would not kneel; she stood upright, still and cold, as though she neither saw nor heard anything of what passed; she would not pity nor forgive the woman, even if, as they seemed to think, she lay dying. But she spoke once, asking in a harsh voice: "Is there no physician in the house or near?"

"None, madam," said the prince. The bishop began the office, and Osra

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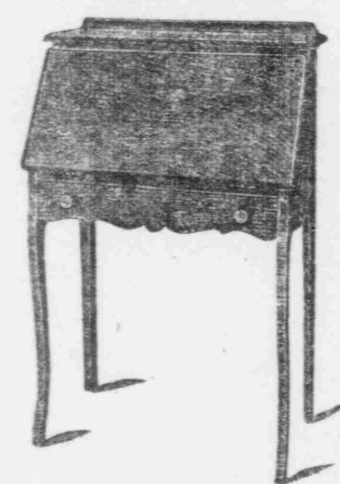
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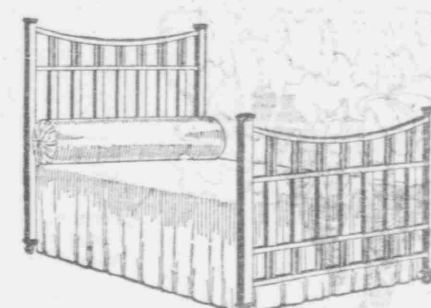
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